

# YOU ARE HERE

## THE JOURNAL OF CREATIVE GEOGRAPHY



ISSUE XVIII: TRANSLATION

Welcome to the 2015 edition of *you are here*!

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# Translation

## A Note from the Editor

“We make a mistake to think that because I call the cow ‘cow,’ that that’s what it calls itself.”

—Lucille Clifton

The American poet Lucille Clifton once argued that all language is translation, “the closest we can come to what we mean.” Her cow, at once familiar and foreign, stands as a cipher for the mysteries of being among other beings. It invites a coming to awareness of the limits of knowing and naming, yet also marks a point of departure for creative exploration of these limits.

For its 2015 issue, *you are here* invited submissions on the theme of translation; what it illumines and what it occults. Drawing from my longstanding interests in literary translation and my new home in the discipline of geography, I posed the following questions to contributors: How does translation influence our perceptions of places, things and other beings? How can the multiplicity of languages and art forms used to make meaning offer insights into a shared world? With these questions I invited explorations of the figurative borderlands of translation, and especially those points at which the search for correspondence comes up against difference. As multiple perspectives enhance depth of field, so translation presented opportunities for exploring singularity in the task of “writing the world.”

The submissions gathered in this issue weigh in on these questions with a proliferation of creative experiments, organized here into three broad themes. In “Translations,” the contributions enact translations across dialects, discursive conventions, and visual media. In “Residual Matter,” they home in on the material residues linking places, people, and things across linguistic and political boundaries. In “Life Among Tongues,” they explore how multilingualism shapes experiences of place, identity, and belonging. While the themes provide a loose organizing framework, the contributions also resonate across them and need not be read in any particular order. Together, they showcase the unique capacities of creative media to reveal places and bodies as sites of difference, and to invite us into new encounters with them.

Fiona Gladstone, 2015 Editor  
School of Geography and Development  
The University of Arizona

# Translations



# Map Paintings

Dan Mills

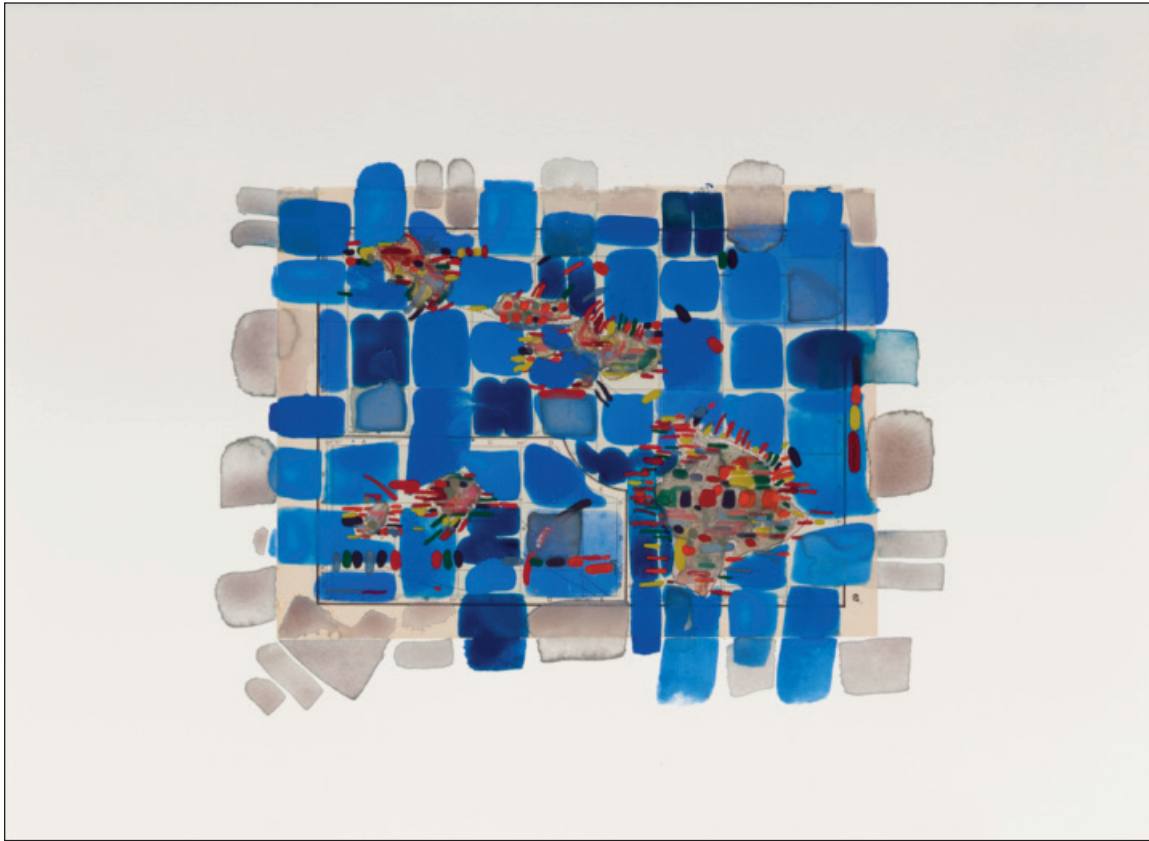
For years, I explored history, colonialism and imperialism in text-laden map works (see *US Future States Atlas*, by Dan Mills). More recently, my work has focused more on visual components. Rather than including descriptive written text about specific aspects of real or imagined history, as in the previous work, these works consider history as a series of superimpositions and erasures. In each, I establish rules and systems based on written information on the map underneath. The resulting works translate the text into aesthetically codified colors, patterns, marks, and shapes that have been determined by the content of the map, but are no longer visible.

## Fictio II



*Fictio II* is painted on top of two identical printed maps. Each side was painted at the same time and painted to be the same; however, the painting is not identical. The same color is used to paint out the name of a body of land or water, but the mark, painted gesturally by hand, cannot be identical.

## Outtake HI



For the unsure viewer, the title provides a hint for the subject of the map in *Outtake HI*. This work is mostly about the surrounding water, and the small lines that paint out the names and extend from the edge of the islands over the water. The resulting painting creates fetish-like objects out of the islands, which seems appropriate: isn't human history a story filled with objects of desire, of coveting others' land, location, and people?

## Riveroj, Lagoj, kaj Montoj



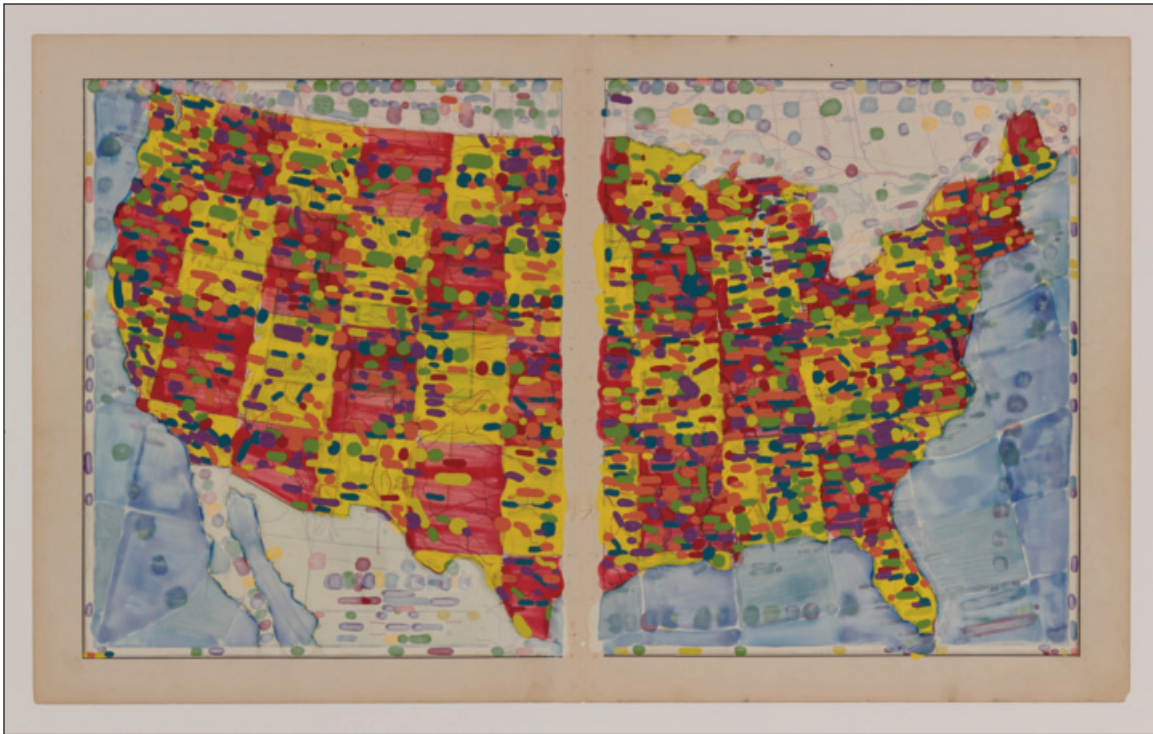
I often use the romantic but flawed language of Esperanto to name my work. It is romantic by goal—to create an international language so people from different cultures and who speak different languages can communicate. It is flawed because its inventors looked only to European languages during its creation, leaving out the languages spoken by the vast majority of the (non-European) world.

My painting has rendered the text of the map in *Riveroj, Lagoj, kaj Montoj* obsolete, and has transformed the map into visual information. Highly consistent and well-organized, the map now has a visual logic, and has no key to unlock any specific meaning.

To paint these works, I first establish certain rules or game-like strategies that determine the colors and related painting decisions. Often they are simple, words starting with certain letters are painted a particular color, for large words, each letter may be painted separately. Map areas may follow similar rules. This makes the painting an act of discovery: I do not know in advance what the work will look like when complete.



## Mapo Tabulludo



I often reference game-boards, such as those used in checkers or chess, in my work. The strategy of these games is to take away your opponents' land or people and winning is achieved by getting everything they have. Mapo Tabulludo features a red and yellow checkerboard that is a stand-in for individual states. The map, a two page spread from a geography textbook, includes a gutter in the center of the image, similar to the crease of a folding game board. It's easy to imagine a player on the right moving westward and conquering a player on the left. The names of places have been painted out, an allusion to the erasure and superimposition of history in the conceptual space of this work.

New York Portait I



*New York Portrait I* is a visual exploration of the city, painted over large maps of Manhattan and its vicinity and the underlying visual and text information about its streets, bridges, parks, subways, and ferry routes. The painting continues recent map painting strategies: establishing rules and systems that determine the colors and shapes so that the map information underneath is painted/painted out. The portraits depict a structural likeness of Manhattan, and the lively and sometimes jarring passages of thickly applied paint capture the energy of life the island and adjacent boroughs and lands. This painting includes several discrete map passages that depict various aspects of Manhattan and vicinity, accompanied by keys, which are painted out using the same strategies. While the text/language of both the maps and codes are no longer visible, they still work logically—the color/visual relationship between them is referential.

# Code Switching a Poem

Elizabeth Bodien

Translation in a broad definition can include code switching between different versions of the same basic language. Standard American English has various dialects or registers based on different geographical regions and class. Occupations also have their own lexicons such that it is often hard for an outsider to understand, hence the popular terms “medicalese,” “legalese,” and “computerese.” Age even comes into play as a variation on the standard form.

Recently I heard a 1961 recording of Sylvia Plath reading her poem “Tulips.” I was moved by what I heard and wrote the poem below:

## After Hearing Sylvia Plath Read “Tulips”

*“I didn’t want any flowers, I only wanted / To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.”*

Sylvia Plath, “Tulips” from *Ariel*

This day is loathe to start, it’s gray,  
a dreary sky, blunt pencil stub.  
But start it does, as if by will,  
a will that warns of laziness.

The light augments, not broad or bright.  
It merely grows, so duty-bound.  
We guess at motive of surroundings,  
assign a gloss to what we see.

Suppose we move, step into action,  
right foot, left foot, gaining distance,  
maintain illusion that there’s purpose,  
hide from eternal emptiness.

Could we change our tone of voice,  
put such words next to each other,  
look from someone else’s eyes,  
and so transform these lives we live?

No way to know until we start,  
push our boat from shore to sea,  
trust wave enough to throw our net,  
if lucky later, finding harbor.



How would these twenty lines read in a cowboy or country register? This is not my own usual speech so the following takes liberties and risks being dated. Nevertheless here is the same poem converted to that register. There are changes of vocabulary, phrasing, and idiom but the result keeps the blank verse and sense of the first iteration.

### **Dreckly After Hearin' Sylvia Plath Read "Tulips"**

This here day don't wanna start,  
that yonder sky, plumb gray and peakid.  
Well bust mah britches, it do start,  
as if afeared of laziness'.

Th' light gits big, ain't broad o' bright,  
a-fixin' to grow, so duty-boun'.

We hanker for th' why of all,  
fetch sum meanin' of these parts.

Jes' suppose we step to ackshun,  
right foot, lef' foot, fer a spell,  
kepp mighty thoughts thet thar's a reason.  
We skeered to see th' nekidness.

C'd we change our wallerin',  
put one good wo'd next to t'other,  
take a gander from other eyes,  
fer onest change up our lives?

No way t'knows 'til we git goin',  
push our boat fum sho' t'sea,  
trest th' waves and throw our net,  
if lucky, by 'n by, git back home.



For yet another shift of register, I translated the lines into text messaging, an increasingly frequent form of communication which challenges geography because of its ubiquity in cyberspace—that region where so many of us live nowadays. The primary principle of text messaging is to make the writing brief and easy to thumb in so only a few capital letters (except acronyms) are used, vowels are dropped where not needed, and numerals replace letters where possible. The key features of texting are not so much a matter of lexicon, syntax, or idiom but rather a matter of orthography. However, I have tried to include some vocabulary choices that might be those of frequent text messagers. Here are the same twenty lines as a text message.

**Fter Hering Sylvia Plath Read “2lips”**

dis dA sEmz nt 2 start, it's meh,  
cldy sky, like pencil stub.  
4COL stRt it does,  
sEmz 2 say, “Gt movin.”

d lite gts bg, NTB  
It grws, thatz all, it shud.  
We gueS @ why envirmnt workz,  
put som mEng 2 wot we c.

Spoz we move, step in2 action,  
rght ft, L ft, gaining dstnce,  
kEp iLusion dat derz prpus,  
hide frm da blank 4EAE.

c%d we chAng our tone of voice,  
put such wrds NXT 2 ech other,  
L%k frm other peeps POV  
& so chAng up dEz livez we liv?

HSIK untl we stRt,  
push our boat frm shOr 2 sea,  
trst wAvz enuf 2 throw our net,  
@TEOTD, finding harbor.

### Texting Abbreviations

4COL = for crying out loud

NTB = not too bright

4EAE = for ever and ever

POV = point of view

HSIK = how should I know

@TEOTD = at the end of the day

peeps = people

The test of this translation experiment would be if the speakers or texters separately read the versions and then were able to agree, at least to some degree, on what the poem says. For now, the experiment is offered in a light and playful spirit of experimentation with the invitation for others to continue with similar experiments, including testing the results with real speakers or texters.

(The original poem "After Hearing Sylvia Plath Read 'Tulips'" has just been published in *Artemis Journal* (April 2015) as "After Reading Sylvia Plath's 'Tulips.'")

# American Letters

Hannah Star Rogers

**Dear Bureau of Land Management,**

It is as simple as the following: on a hillside trail outside Yuma that I have climbed to get a better look at your latest permitting of a private fracking operation, what is under a birder's hat tells me that you employed him at graduation, as soon as he got his citizenship. His parents lived right over the line in Old Mexico and his mother wanted to live on this side because she liked the steady freezer temperatures, something about intermittent electricity. All that must have been in the '60s from the looks of things, but this week some folks from D.C. are up to look for land no one does anything on so the taxes haven't been paid—maybe ever. They've come to collect, but everyone figures it will be federal or auctioned, and he is thinking you should get it all: it's been wild so far he says—why should that change?

**Dear NASA,**

I met you for the first time in Huntsville in the 6th grade and all I remember was one father's suggestion that some of the adults on the overstaffed overnighiter could skip the rocket-shaped chicken and take lunch at Hooters. Now my students are begging me to bring them to you. Wallops Island is not so far from the geese-wintering refuge, so the scorched earth your private enterprise left on our collective property seems like a good lesson. The surprise is the flight director, Lyndi, about my age, who presses her tortoise-shell headband into her temples as the field trip coordinator says, the professor would like you to tell them about the day of the accident. The students leaned forward, but I lean back away from the badge dangling over her elbow when shyness crosses her arms.

**Dear Domestic Violence Hotline,**

Before morning, I will hose the blood off the porch but right now she is telling me something about a chair: that the leg went between her neck and collarbone. I honestly cannot imagine that much force but all she wants is to borrow the telephone, and I know it's true. She doesn't have one. She came up here yesterday to ask for four dollars for gas. There is a little bleeding around her bottom gum, so

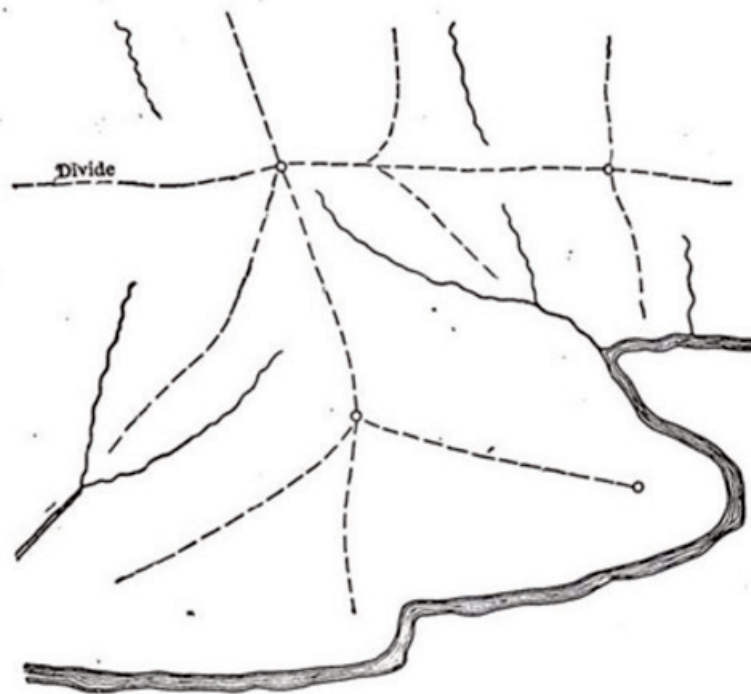
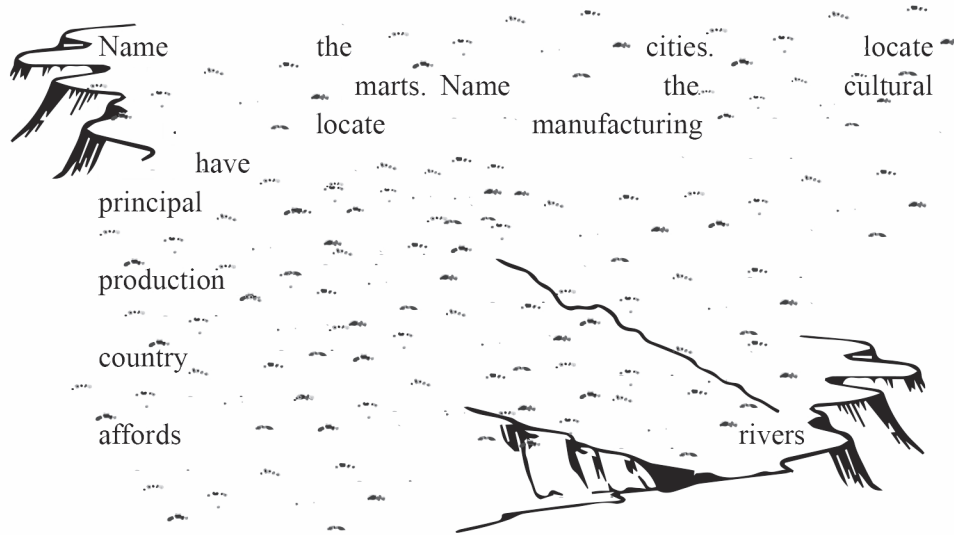
for some reason a washrag seems like a good idea. She makes no move to come inside, so I scramble for the phone and a hotel pen and pad. A glass of water occurs to me. A comforter occurs to me. The contents of my whole rental house occur to me.

**Dear FAA,**

This possibility really never occurred to me. I knew it could happen, but I assumed I would be at home. I pictured my own comforter, my own ringed tub. Certainly I thought I could stretch out. The woman on the plane beside me works for you. She's a wildlife biologist and she takes away all the food birds might like around airports so your flocks don't encounter their flocks. She grew up in Brussels but met an American professor on sabbatical. She's asleep now, with her blond dreadlock-beads clicking quietly against the window. She already told me how she is glad she didn't have children because it makes her transfer from Denver to Miami much easier. I guess I don't look pregnant to her and in a few hours I won't be. Was this your way of preparing me?

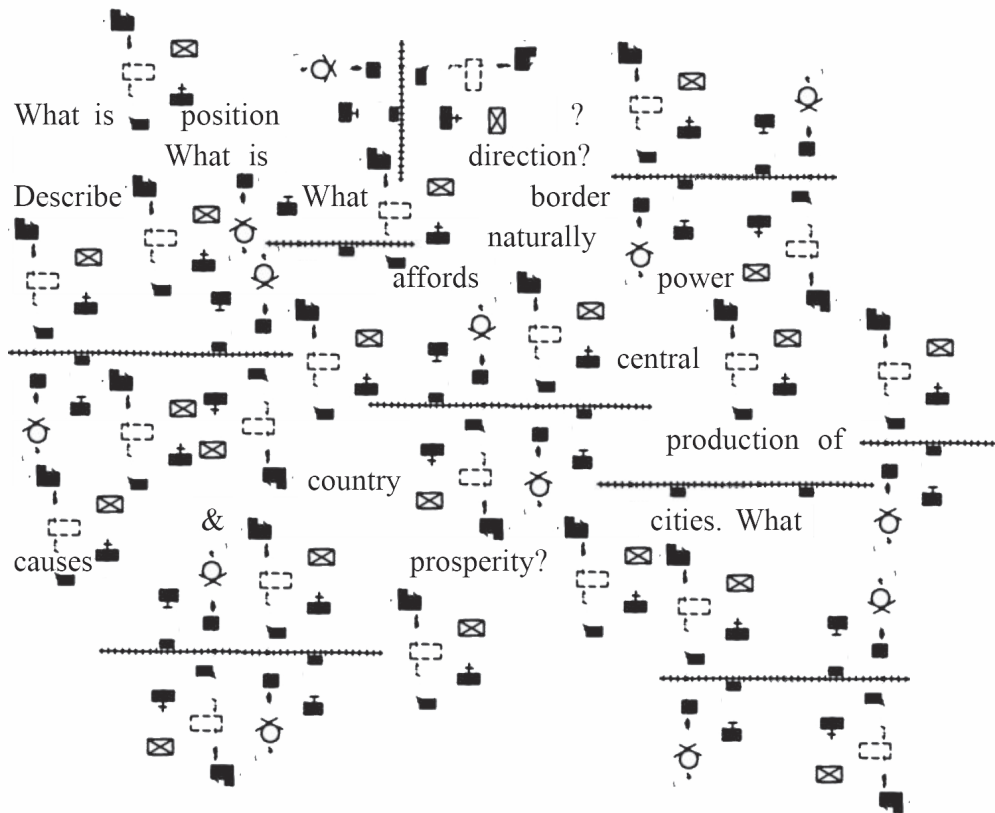
# Cartography

Douglas Luman









Image/Figures: Finch, J.K. Topographic Maps and Sketch Mapping.  
New York: John Wiley & Sons. 1920.

Text: Keam, Peter and John Mickleborough. A Handbook of Map Drawing.  
Philadelphia: E.H. Butler & Co. 1869.



# Lost in Translation: Place- and Meaning-Making Among Kolkata's Rickshaw Wallahs

Shireen Hyrapiet

Hand-pulled rickshaws have existed in Kolkata, India for over one hundred years. Kolkata is the only city in the world that continues to house a sizeable fleet of human-powered rickshaws. In 2006, the state government of West Bengal banned the rickshaws as inappropriate anachronisms. In an interview, a senior government official stated the following as grounds for removal of the rickshaws, "Since the 1980s humanitarian associations have been questioning the issue of one man pulling another and saying that, when we are going into the 21st century one man pulling another is not only inhumane, but does not depict a good picture of society. [Furthermore], the traffic department found it inconvenient [...] the state is trying to introduce high speed moving vehicles." Since this ban, however, many rickshaw pullers have continued their work and evaded enforcement.

As part of my PhD dissertation I explored the work and lives of rickshaw pullers, or *wallahs*. Often, images of rickshaw pulling convey a world which dehumanizes the rickshaw wallahs and relegates them to the depths of impoverishment and squalor. While the living and working conditions of the rickshaw *wallahs* are certainly deplorable, they still consider themselves better off among the laborers who constitute a majority of the city's informal work force. For example, an older rickshaw *wallah* related to me, "I used to work as a coolie, but there was no profit so rickshaw pulling was my only option. There were older guys here, they told me, why don't you pull a rickshaw—you can earn so much more and feed your family."

Media representations of the rickshaws conceal the myriad ways in which the rickshaw *wallahs* derive meaning from their livelihoods and afford themselves upward mobility. Moreover, media representations of rickshaw *wallahs* offer not just an inaccurate translation of the lifeworlds of the rickshaw pullers, but also detract from how a profession like rickshaw pulling contributes to place- and meaning-making for the residents and the city of Kolkata. The following images and quotes from my research offer an alternative narrative to the world of rickshaw pulling in the city of Kolkata.

(All photos by the author.)



*Rickshaw wallah: "[I am] well known here so they allow me to sleep free of charge."*

*Rickshaw owner: "They are around here, so there are no robberies. They are our security."*

*Kolkata resident: "Rickshaw wallahs sleep in their rickshaws, taxi drivers lock their vehicles and go away from there. Only the rickshaw wallah is always with his vehicle so he answers the call of help late at night."*

*Kolkata resident: "They sleep in our building at night. Many years ago, there was a fire in the building. They saw the fire start in an electric box and alerted everyone."*

*Rickshaw wallah: "In emergencies in the middle of the night, when there are no taxis or autos people wake me up from sleep and ask me to take them to the hospital."*





Kolkata resident:  
 “[For] single ladies,  
 [traveling] alone, taxis  
 will take them anywhere.  
 Rickshaws are  
 dependable, [they are]  
 good guys, [they will] take  
 you through the lanes but  
 bring you home without a  
 problem. We believe  
 them and hope they are  
 never removed from  
 [Kolkata] Calcutta.”

Rickshaw wallah: “All types of people, women, sick, old, schoolkids; we take people to markets, we take everyone, we don’t leave anyone.”

Kolkata resident: “The markets are in the interior from the main roads. For people to get to the main roads they need rickshaws.”

Rickshaw wallah:  
 “During floods only  
 we will go, we  
 make hospital trips,  
 we take school  
 kids, office-goers,  
 all these people  
 will have trouble.”

Kolkata resident:  
 “When it floods,  
 only he’ll take you  
 through high water  
 and even during  
 bandhs (strikes).”



Rickshaw wallah: “Besides during floods, nothing else moves, all motorized transport comes to a halt, we help people even get across the streets during floods, only we continue to move.”



*City official: "They are local guardians of schoolchildren, they pick up the kids, drop them off to school and they are there to pick them up from school right on time too and drop them back home to their parents."*

*Rickshaw wallah: "Parents will only give their kids into a rickshaw wallah's care to drop off and pick up from school or to take anywhere else. They won't leave their kids with a taxi man."*

*Kolkata resident: "Parents leave their little children in the pullers' care to take them to school and pick them up. He looks after them. Parents are not doing this work, a poor man is doing it."*



*Rickshaw owner: "These are pollution free."*

*Rickshaw wallah: "There is no smoke from this, it does not take mobile oil, we burn our blood and run this, there is no pollution."*

*Kolkata resident: "[It is] pollution free and people friendly."*





## Drawings on Foreign Policy

Dmitry Borshch

... Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην ... καὶ ἔκραξεν ἐν ἰσχυρᾷ φωνῇ λέγων, "Ἐπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, καὶ ἐγένετο κατοικητήριον δαιμονίων καὶ φυλακὴ παντὸς πνεύματος ἀκαθάρτου καὶ φυλακὴ παντὸς ὀρνέου ἀκαθάρτου ...



*Another angel gave a mighty shout. Revelation 18:2*





*Bush–Maliki News Conference.  
Baghdad December 2008*

*Doctor Kissinger, also called  
'In seine Hand die Macht gegeben'*

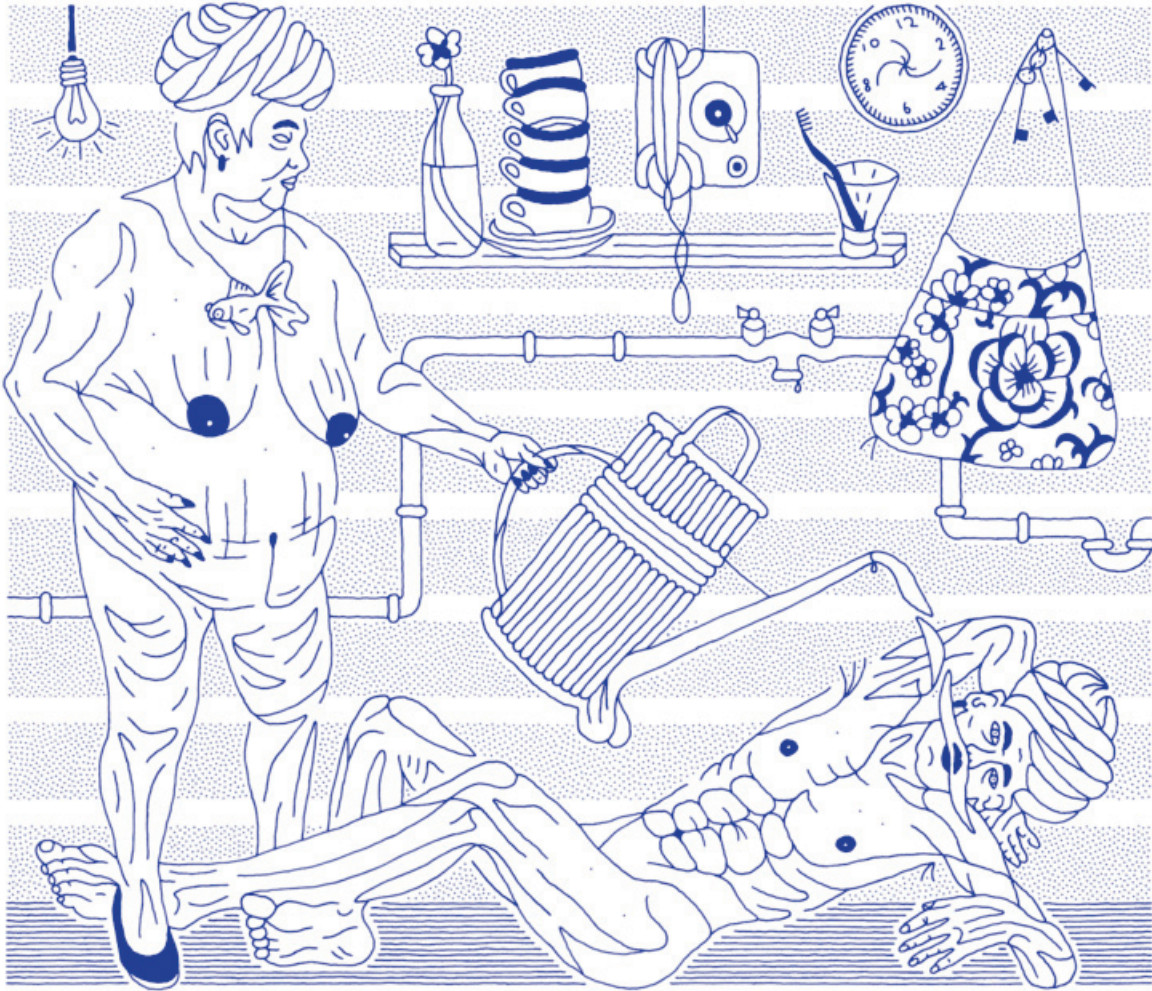




١ إِيَّيَّ وَإِنْ كُنْتُ ابْنُ سَيِّدِ عَامِرٍ  
 ٢ قَمَا سَوَّيْتَنِي عَامِرٌ عَنْ قَرَابَةٍ  
 ٣ وَلَكِنِّي أَحْمَى حِمَاهَا وَاتَّقَى  
 وَقَارِسَهَا الْمُنْدُوبَ فِي كُلِّ مَوْكِبٍ  
 أَبِي اللَّهِ أَنْ أَسْمُو بِأَمٍّ وَلَا أَبٍ  
 أَدَاهَا وَأَرْمَى مَنْ رَقَاهَا بِعُنُكِبٍ

*The Good Arab*





*Waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah*



## Residual Matter

# A Hot Griddle in a Small Town

Martha Pskowski

*Loroco: Scientific name, Fernaldia pandurata. A plant native to El Salvador. Its small white flower is a principal ingredient in the pupusa, a corn-dough tortilla pocket. The pupusa can be filled with beans, cheese and loroco, amongst other options, and is typical to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.*

The pupusa and its sidekick loroco travel across borders and cultures, surviving civil wars and mass migration. Hence, I learned how to make pupusas in Mexico, from a Salvadoran. David, whose biggest role model was Bruce Lee and his greatest dream to reach the United States. All of us far from home. David, the pupusa, me.

I wonder about that patch of loroco growing in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, hundreds of miles north of its origins. Did some migrant, home-sick on his way north, plant it? Did the seeds slip from someone's pocket as they chased down The Beast, the train Central Americans ride through Mexico to the U.S. border?



*Ixtepec, Oaxaca*

We were in the migrant shelter in Ixtepec, home to 50 people on up to 200 on any given day. Salvadorans, Hondurans, Guatemalans, a Cuban here or there, a handful of nuns and a few gringo volunteers like me. Here in a dusty, humid corner of Oaxaca, on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, where 120 miles separate the Pacific Ocean from the Gulf of Mexico, President Porfirio Díaz once dreamt of building his empire upon the iron stakes of the railroad. Today the passengers of the rails have to pay their fare to the gangs that patrol the abandoned train stations. The conductor takes his cut, and if you're lucky, in



two weeks you'll make it to the border with Texas or Arizona.

David and I are in the kitchen, already broiling from the heat of the wood-fired stove. Whatever the provenance of the loroco, we chop it thin, and begin. In his white tank showing off his kung-fu inspired tattoos, David sets the pace. We stay up the better part of the night making hundreds of pupusas for a breakfast banquet the next morning. Around 3am I break through the exhaustion. Smooth, uniform disks slide off my palms, one after another.

I ask David how he learned to make pupusas. *Mi mamá*, he tells me. I wonder what she looks like, when she last heard from David, what her home is like in La Libertad, in between *la playa y la capital*. We share this language now, the pupusa, the *masa*, translated through a new pair of hands.

Pupusas *a la* David with the kung-fu tattoos: First, mix the *masa*, or dough, from corn flour. It should be stiff enough to hold its form but also pliable. Then the cheese, shredded. Pureed beans. The loroco. Dab a bit of bean and cheese or loroco and cheese into a flat patty of dough. Tenderly mold the dough around the filling, getting it just right so the filling is all wrapped up and the dough stretches without breaking. Then flatten it out and toss it onto the *comal*, a big flat griddle. Flip a few times to cook to perfection.

The smell tantalizes the men and women passing through the kitchen to wash their dishes. “¿Es loroco?” “¿Sabes como lo preparamos en Guate?” My strange *gringa* intonation is overlooked; their rapid-fire Central American Spanish becomes less daunting. Here in the kitchen, now we're talking, no translation necessary.

Let's not forget the fixings. The salsa, fresh from chilies and tomatoes, but not too spicy. And *curtido*, a pickled combination of cabbage and carrot. *Ojo*, don't forget: the pupusa is not to be eaten with utensils. Hands only for the full experience.

In the little details, Central America is transposed onto Ixtepec: a club plays reggaeton instead of cumbia one night, teenage boys request their slick San Salvador haircuts in the little barber shop, we share pupusas and *platanos fritos*. After this initiation, I, like the pupusa, want to test my geographical limits. Having heard one too many story, I want to experience Central America without translation. I head south.

After twenty hours, four buses and one questionable border crossing, I find pupusas in Antigua, Guatemala. Delectable. Crossing the border into El Salvador more pupusas await me, now in dollars instead of pesos or quetzals. Arriving in San Salvador, there are so many fillings and fixings and portion sizes to choose from. Corn or rice-based *masa*. *Con queso o sin queso*. Made by little old *señoras* and brisk young ladies. On every street corner and roadside pit stop. I learn a new word: *pupusodromo*: a whole bunch of *pupuserias* in a row.

I admittedly eat too many pupusas, have a stomach ache that trails me from San Salvador back up to Mexico. My diet returns to tacos and tamales.

In a Facebook message that reaches me in a bar in Chiapas, David tells me he got stuck

in Tijuana. He's waiting for money, waiting to cross, waiting for a lucky break. I wonder if there's any loroco in Tijuana. I forget to ask.

Months later, I am home in Washington DC, where instead of taco shops we have *pupuserias* and blue-and-white Salvadoran flags fly on car hoods and out apartment windows. I eat pupusas once again, this time with a Salvadoran friend who's made it north, in a restaurant called Chicken House where no one seems to be eating chicken. We clink beer bottles and cheers to good health.

Dropping him off, police circle the apartment complex where he lives and commutes to work at a construction company. They pull over a guy driving up to his building, and he stumbles through their questioning in English. My friend, with whom Spanish comes easiest, is antsy. We embrace saying goodbye and he goes inside.

I get word David was deported back to La Libertad.

All the miles, and months and borders later, the pupusas I can't forget were those with loroco in Oaxaca. Thrown on a hot griddle in a small town. All of us far from home. David with the kung-fu tattoos, the pupusa, the loroco by the train tracks, and me.

To absent friends, and what's left behind to speak for them.



*Tenosique, Tabasco*

(All photos by the author)

# The Saree Express

Elizabeth Rush

“Every train in Bangladesh is late,” the stationmaster said, “but not the train to Hili, the train to Hili is always on time.”

He pushed the tissue-paper-thin ticket across the counter. The frame wrapping around his window was losing little flakes of its poppy red varnish. “Make sure you are back by six tomorrow morning,” he added, pulling at his mustache, frowning. A drowsy fog slipped through the single-room hall. Hee-li. On the stationmaster’s tongue the town’s name flirted with song but I was too tired to try to imagine Hili. The three weeks I had spent reporting on the India-Bangladesh border made thinking beyond the immediate difficult. Ehsan, my translator, and I turned our backs to the mustached man and entered the blue hour between day and night.

Smoke and the smell of something leaven carried us into Saidpur. We coasted down a rocky hill on the back of an oxcart and entered a vascular network of wide roads. Poured concrete and corrugated tin reigned. Low buildings hugged the ground. Over the railroad tracks we bumped and out into the suburbs on the other side of town only to find that the hotel Ehsan usually stayed at had been turned into an NGO with the same name. A shiny vinyl sign with an image of a woman and her very white teeth clapped against the chain link fence. Some twenty kilometers to our west the line between India and Bangladesh cut through the land, following no topography, scarring an otherwise steady expanse.

Hili, Bangladesh—a smuggler’s so-called Zion, a tiny border town just about an hour south and west of Saidpur—was our real destination. According to Ehsan, Hili did not have any hotels. When not acting as my translator, Ehsan monitored election corruption in the Bengali hinterlands. If he was lying about there being no hotels in Hili—and I suspected he was—I knew he had a good reason. When I researched the India-Bangladesh border most of the stories were about the torture and sporadic killing of cattle smugglers by India’s Border Security Force. But when I asked Bangladeshis about the border the answer was always the same: “Go to Hili, then you will understand.”

\* \* \*

The morning train to Hili was punctual, just as the stationmaster had said. The green-and-yellow striped Barendra Express clanked into the station as daylight turned the smoke from the paratha stands into a fleet of clouds. Originally part of the route connecting Kolkata and Assam, this line was built by the British and was once used to transport tea. Some hundreds of miles south of the Himalayan foothills and sixty years past the time when free travel between East and West Bengal was permitted, much was as it had been, with a few notable exceptions. This particular train now ran a hundred-mile loop. North to south and back again from Nilphamari to Rajshahi mostly along the border, all in Bangladesh. Across from Rajshahi, on the Indian side, the route resumed and ran between Lagola and Kolkata.

The original link between the big city and the big mountains had been broken by the arbitrary international border the British gave the subcontinent as a parting gift.

Beyond my window the ochre land spread out long and wide in both directions. The aquifer was unusually low that year. And thanks to the rising seas, small amounts of salt water from the Bay of Bengal had begun to creep into it, filling hollow caverns beneath the surface of the earth, making the rice and lentils wilt. Ehsan and I walked down to the meal car and ordered two coffees each. The metal connectors between cars slammed together and the train leaned hard as we curved along a raised embankment.

The man across from me read aloud from a small spiral-bound notebook: "Twenty sarees, two packages of gold bangles, a flat of gold-plated earrings, fifty bags of zeera, five meal carriers, and a pouch of spoons." The young boy at his side punched a bunch of numbers into his Nokia. He checked his math again. The boss handed him a stack of money. The boy licked his forefinger and his thumb. He counted hundreds of worn taka frontwards and back.

The men stopped and stared. They looked down at my pad where I was scribbling my own notes and then up at my white cheeks, my white skin, my white wrists. I wrapped my shawl up around my head and kept writing. They quickly lost interest in me, returning to the everyday work of smuggling.

Men clustered around every flat surface in the meal car. Little notebooks and piles of money, the keys to their self-made kingdoms, lay on the octagonal tabletops that had been painted white over and over again. Behind me sat a collection of the train's conductors. Shotguns and ammo belts clinked on their faded, blue-uniformed shoulders. They were the least preoccupied of all, lazily sipping their morning tea, completely uninterested by the surrounding flurry of last-minute preparation. I had never seen a ticket collector carry a personal arsenal, but then I had never seen men planning smuggling missions on a commuter train either.

\* \* \*

Two weeks earlier I had been in Kolkata, on the other side of the fence, charming my way into formal meetings with Border Security Officers and policymakers. I was researching the role economics and security played not only in the building and maintenance of India's fence but also in Indians' perception of the wall. Twenty-five years in the making, India's border fence was the longest geopolitical barrier in the world and would be completed that year: 3,286 kilometers of three-meter-high barbed wire, guarded by the 240,000 employees of India's Border Security Force. Those who lived far from the fence spoke of it as "a modern Great Wall of China," an "impenetrable partition." But the closer I drew to the thing itself the more I realized just how far popular perception was from reality. Porous does not even begin to describe the fence. The sheer volume of what passes through is mind-boggling. Millions of dollars in contraband goods move from India into Bangladesh every single day—drugs, luxury items, and the everyday stuff upon which life depends: sugar, soap, onions.

I wanted to know what motivated the incredible disparity between the image of the fence and the reality, so I started to ask around.

“Tell me about cross-border traffic,” I would ask

“Nothing crosses the border. No goods. No people.” “What purpose does the fence serve?”

“To keep unwanted immigrants and Islamist militants out.”

And so on. Almost all of the answers I received were simply false, a propagation of the myth that India’s border fence had truly severed India from Bangladesh.

Desperate for some scrap that had traction, I decided to take a day off and visit a friend of a friend, Supriyo Sen, a filmmaker living just south of Kolkata’s famous Kali Temple. When I arrived, his wife was milling about in her house slippers, preparing for an afternoon at the Asiatic Society. An auntie was called over to sip tea with the foreigner. We shared news of people we knew in common and talked about the weather. And those things alone might have been enough to drain the pervasive false feeling that had accumulated in my brain and limbs. But as the day grew red and warm, Supriyo excused himself and invited me to retreat to his office to watch the third in his cinematic trilogy about India’s borders, a short documentary called *Wagah*.

In the opening shot three children fly a kite. At first they are totally engrossed by the challenge of getting it off the ground. As the little white triangle lifts higher and higher into the sky the children let out more string. Suddenly the little boy laughs at something. The shot widens and you can see a bird flying above the border fence.

“Birds do not know that here and there are not the same,” the boy says.

A hundred years ago, here and there were the same. Kolkata was the cultural capital of Bengal and of all of India. The British, in cleaving East and West Bengal in two, had separated Kolkata’s factories from the raw goods they processed, causing the capital city to fall into a sharp decline just after partition. By the sixties, India was able to irrigate large sections of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, manufacturing the agricultural breadbasket they lost, reinvigorating the growth of the increasingly Westernized middle class. Bangladesh, on the other hand, struggled to compete for the same international business that India’s advanced industrial sector cornered, and began to rely on India for many of the luxury products that their own factories simply could not produce as well or as cheaply. Compound this double setback with the reality that India’s upstream irrigation had reduced the flow of the Ganges into Bangladesh by fifty percent and you get a vision of Bangladesh today—powerless, dependent, and thirsty.

\* \* \*

“On the other side, in the Indian Hili, I have a partner. I call him and tell him what I want, and he orders the goods from Kolkata,” Jhid explained as he looked over the list of items he was expecting to pick up. Jhid was one of about two-dozen traders



congregated in the Barendra Express's meal car. He specializes in women's goods and ready-made vests.

All of the towns on the Bangladeshi side north of Hili have secret traders. Jhid said he buys for half of the stores in Saidpur. Behind him stood Sirajul, who procured products for stores in Philburi. And across the way was Nurul who purchased for Nilphamari. Bangladeshis complain that smuggling is the second-largest industry in the country, trailing only textile production. Informal human chains, sometimes tens if not hundreds of people deep, carry millions of dollars in illegal goods to and from and across the India- Bangladesh border every day.

When I asked Jhid about his role in this informal network he explained, "Me? Really, I am only in charge of transport. I control twenty-five women, they are my," he paused, looking for the right word, "my human mules."

Every other car on the train was stocked with a seemingly endless supply of women. A sea of dusty sarees. The chatter was quieter, like hundreds of tiny bells being struck. Heads rested on shoulders, on sacks of rice, in hands. As I walked out amongst them I relaxed. Joy, or something like it, actually entered my body in the form of an estrogen contact-high. For months I had been reporting in India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, and during that time I was always proving to the men I interviewed and worked with that I, a young woman, was perfectly capable, able to do the task set before me. Here, on the Barendra Express, my abilities were no longer questioned. I could have sworn something passed between those women and myself, something intimate and unknowable. We were all experts in the art of solitary prowess.

In Hili the train emptied. The women disembarked and walked boldly to the best patch of shade beneath the acacia tree, or over to the colonial- era train station with its small cupola and red brick walls. They leaned their backs against the baked clay and waited. Like a giant letter C a brick wall encircled the Hili train station. Four meters high, India erected this portion of the border fence in 1996.

Not ten minutes after the Barendra Express had pulled into the station, boys and girls were running along the top of India's multibillion-dollar defense project, their bare feet padding along the sun-warmed brick, their arms heavy with ornamental wedding sarees. The children scurried down bamboo ladders propped up against the wall every fifty meters or so, handing off armfuls of sparkly fabric to those who went before. So easy were their movements, so malleable and determined their little bodies. And then I realized they were doing what those who lived in India's capital cities had told me was impossible. Those children were climbing right up and over India's impenetrable wall. The BFS guards watched but did not shoot.

The children ran over to the women from the train and dropped the contraband goods at their feet. They did not linger in Bangladesh. A little boy handed a package of sweater vests to Jhid. Before I could whistle he had returned to India. Jhid slipped a polyester vest over his head. He wrapped a pashmina shawl around his neck. The peasant women from the train were transformed. Suddenly I was surrounded by



middle class mothers seeing their daughters off in marriage, by Dhaka-dwellers attending NGO fundraisers. The worn blue-grays and yellow-grays and red-grays of the old sarees were all covered over.

That's when I finally understood—the women who rode the Barendra Express carried the contraband sarees through the country on their bodies. Human mules for sparkly smuggled goods. One slender woman, her thick black hair pulled into a ponytail, her forehead beading with sweat in the midday heat, draped a ruby swath of chiffon over her arm. She pulled the chiffon back and draped it again, as though it were her own, as though she were about to visit someone whose eyes would trace every inch of her body. Few showed as much reverence for the glittery cloth. "She has not been a courier for long," the grandmother seated beside grumbled as she tossed her own saree over a shoulder. The youngest girls were adorned with gold-plated bangles and tear-drop necklaces. They looked like my nieces playing dress-up. Shy and lovely, those girls looked at me with quixotic and curious expressions, unsure of whether they wanted my attention.

Without formally offering, Jhid became my guide to Hili and the art of smuggling sarees. As he whisked me through the torturous midday sun he explained how he became involved in the trade: "I worked in a jeans factory for many years but my mother got sick and I couldn't support her. I made about \$35 a month in the factory, so I started doing this. Now my mother is well. She works for me." He pulled harder at my arm. "Come, meet her."

We walked from oasis of shade to oasis of shade looking for his mother. First we found Bano, her sister. She was a beautiful woman with a wide, moon-like face. When she saw my camera she pulled close the man nearest to her and posed. They squinted and gave sturdy smiles in unison. Jhid's mother was just a few leaf-shadow-islands further. Her hair was gray and wiry. She was wearing a ruby saree covered in gold sequins. On her head, an absurd snow hat that she would also smuggle away from Hili. For every item Jhid's mother got to Saidpur she would receive twenty taka, a little less than twenty-five cents.

\* \* \*

An hour passed. the chatter slowly died. A group of young men in fatigues walked by and everything changed. Their batons were over their heads. One black stick came down on a woman's back. She was wearing amethyst. The color of protection. The women seated with her scurried away and the circle of guards tightened. The sticks rained down one after the other after the other. I can still hear the thud of wood on flesh.

The old woman released the hidden cumin sacks slung like a child beneath her saree. I couldn't tell how she did it exactly, but with the next blow the treasured spices came tumbling down to the ground. As the satchels landed on the parched earth they made a crinkling sound. The guards stopped hitting her then and stooped to pick up the contraband. Jhid pushed me through the crowd of people.

The old woman grasped the guard's ankles and banged her forehead against his patent leather shoes.

"I lost everything," she screamed, taking her legs up under her body, pulling her face even closer to his feet. "I lost everything." She wailed it again and again. She begged them then to leave just a few of the spice bags behind.

"Take a picture." Jhid whispered in my ear. "You can do it." I did not want to capture this woman's suffering. But I wondered if that was the correct impulse or the truest one. I thought of Carolyn Forché then, whose work in El Salvador had inspired what some call modern poetry's greatest task— to witness and work against forgetting. We must disassemble the wall of comfort we have erected between personal and political experience, I thought to myself. I held my camera to my chest and pressed the shutter. I was too scared or ashamed to hold the camera to my face. The photograph is blurry. All you see are fingers gripped around ankles.

Before the guard wrestled free he dropped three of the bags of zeera back on the ground. When he left, those who had backed away moved forward again, a human shroud tossed over the suffering. One offered her a hand up. The woman wrapped in the purple saree allowed herself to be pulled to sitting, but no more.

"It's a matter of luck." A grandfather pressed those words into my ear, trying to do what exactly? To soothe me or explain? His breath smelled like betel. "Five percent have none, but the other ninety-five percent, they have plenty of luck." His tongue clicked softly against his teeth.

Ehsan and Jhid and I watched the guards walk down the tracks, carrying the zeera back to their tin outpost. "They could stop the smuggling if they wanted to. But this, this is egregious. This is just violence to fill quotas, to make it seem like they are trying to stop smuggling," Ehsan said. "Many people in Dhaka are paid to dole out border positions. The money you make at the border is notoriously good and reliable." For the first time in the short history of our partnership he did not appease me with a smile.

We stood on the tracks and watched two more caravans of soldiers walk out amongst the women. No one ran. To run would attract too much attention. They sat still and prayed not to be amongst the chosen.

The second woman was not so ready to release her goods. She rolled onto her back when the billy clubs started to come down. She was trying to protect the spices, the very spices whose safe passage had already been secured by a small bribe. Furious and impatient, the young guard bent over and ripped at her clothes. Now the dulsecolored satchels emerged from beneath her body. And then out came a brand-new plastic-wrapped saree. Unlike many of the women, she had chosen to carry her saree underneath her plainclothes.

She lay on the ground for a long time after that. Her legs twisted one way and her torso twisted the other. And all of her spices and her saree gone.

According to Jhid, these goods would eventually make their way to the stores in the surrounding villages. And the border guards would be triply wealthy—once for their salaries, once for the bribe the traders paid to guarantee the safe passage of the contraband across the border, and once for the sale of what the guards had approved for passage and then taken by force.

Bano stood beside me—lucky, untouched, and watchful. The glitter on her wedding saree caught the light and sparkled hard against it.

\* \* \*

Just before departure I walked through the Hili stationmaster's office. Some of the most beautiful sarees I have ever seen were laid out across his desk. When I emerged from the WC the sarees were gone. The stationmaster smiled, the women seated nearby smiled, I smiled. Not one of us said a word. Two hours after the Barendra Express dropped us off, it rolled through again, right on time and headed back north. Illegal enterprises simply cannot thrive without the cooperation of the authorities on some level. Bribing border guards and conductors in order to push your contraband across and through a state-run apparatus is expected. But the active participation of the country's largest public transportation network? That I had not expected. Bangladesh's outdated transportation system is crumbling beneath the weight of the country's 142 million inhabitants. Often trains are five and six and seven hours late. Sometimes they simply fail to arrive. But someone somewhere had been paid a lot to make sure the track was always clear for the Saree Express.

When it reappeared the women all launched to their feet with a ferocity I had yet to witness. Getting on board was like fighting for a place in a storm. This was the most vulnerable time. The guards strode through the teeming women, zeroing in at random. I stood back for a moment and counted five being beaten, but then it was difficult to keep track and Jhid was pushing me up into the compartment.

"Get on, get on," he kept saying. His voice was thick and strong and stood out against the general disorder that had descended upon Hili.

We pulled away from the station and the guards returned to their headquarters about a fourth of a kilometer down the line, having done all that they would do for the day. Some of the men were already napping by the time we passed.

On board, Ehsan and I pushed through the crowd, which felt more immense, more agitated and hostile than the group of women we had ridden down with. Everyone was sweaty and scared, smashed up against each other, a mess of dust and gems.

Ehsan constantly looked back to make sure I was still with him. Sometimes I held my arms above my head to squeeze through a narrow pass, the walls around me constructed by immovable women. A spot on the return train was not something anyone was willing to compromise. After four or five cars like this Ehsan stopped. He pushed aside a heavy metal door and dragged me into a small compartment, first class.

"We will upgrade our tickets when the conductor comes through," he said.

I protested. "I want to go back out there and talk with more people." I was overcome with a feeling not of curiosity so much as deep admiration.

"You go," Ehsan said, "But leave your camera and your bag here. I will watch it for you. There are too many people too close together outside, and your things are not safe."

I found Bano and Jhid. Bano had lost half of her goods. A guard in Hili had beaten her and taken the saree she stashed under the glittery one she wore. The dust gathered in spots on her clothing: a blossom on her bottom and one on her back. Bano, at least, was a family member of the trader and so she would not have to shoulder her financial loss alone. When the train stopped, Jhid leaned out the window to monitor his women. If any left the train he made a note of who it was and immediately they were moved onto a list of those who might lie about being beaten by a guard to account for some loss of goods.

When I got home I would spend months trying, in vain, to figure out who controlled the Barendra Express's schedule. No one returned my emails or my phone calls. And who could blame them? In April of the following year, the Minister of the Railroads, Suranjit Sengupta, resigned after allegations surfaced around his collecting bribes for the illegal allocation of positions within the railroad department. He was arrested in a minibus with his two personal secretaries and \$86,000 in cash, roughly fifteen times the amount a saree smuggler could hope to make if she worked every single day for twenty-five years.

\* \* \*

On our last night together Ehsan and I walked through the market in Saidpur. We had spent weeks together, and during that time he became a dear friend. We were reluctant to part.

We turned a corner and there they were. The saree stalls. From a slight remove, the saffron and pink and emerald and ruby silk looked like a modern art installation—the surfaces just surfaces—thin lines of various colors, alternating randomly, neatly stacked.

"I need to bring back a present for my wife, Naipur," Ehsan said as we strolled through the narrow alleyways. Honey tunnels in a hive. There were pashmina paisley scarves like the one Jhid had wrapped around his shoulders in Hili that morning. And next to the shawls were the sarees—brighter and even more dazzling now that a vacuum had sucked up all the dust. The silver and gold sequins hand-sewn onto long swaths of perfect factory-made Indian chiffon were dazzling. Ehsan asked one of the vendors to display a few. The man sat just above our waist level on a little platform. He unfurled a jade saree with metallic rhinestones. I asked him to show me something pink and silver, of the princess varietal, to bring back to my nieces.

*(This essay originally appeared in Witness Magazine.)*

# Diptych

Dave Iasevoli

## Higher Learning

When I went to Bonn to study a semester  
and learn the language, face-to-face,  
I met my father's people for the first time,  
and hitchhiked to Darmstadt to meet Giovanni,  
his youngest brother, the immigrant welder.

He resembled my dad, but a much younger version,  
shorter and lighter, and after we shook hands  
he turned over my hands to examine the palms,  
then declared, in German, "Intellectual," and grinned,  
to tease me perhaps, and to show me my place.

At this moment of greetings, he saw a youth  
who thought for a living, whose hands were as smooth  
as pure white paper, perhaps even as soft as a priest's,  
and I vowed that I'd work till my hands turned to callus,  
I'd fall asleep in my clothes, learn to get dirty.

## *Vorsicht*

He taught me to weld, how to melt metal to metal,  
how to cut plate steel as thick as a thumb  
and leave only a ripple resembling a scar,  
how to clamp down on the arc, pulsing with power  
like a bolt of pure energy some demon might wield.

I recalled Greek myth, the kid stories I devoured  
about heroes and failure, when my arc simply slipped  
down a few inches and burned through the black glove  
right down to a nail: my middle finger poked through  
with a neat hole, and a smell like burnt hair, almost sweet.

My uncle stood over me, grinning again; in the din  
of the factory he spoke precisely, in German,  
one word that I knew and knew in my bones:  
"Caution," he said, but the word sounds like "Foresight:  
Look ahead when you toil, *look out* but not back."

# Martin Behaim to Pope Clement VI on the Incomplete Maps (1342 A. D.)

Tom Holmes

No two countries are the same,  
and before Easter arrives,  
their boundaries will shift,  
again, from war or politics  
or the slip of a copyist's pen.

Or will be found a new animal,  
or a race of people will be acknowledged,  
these maps will read like stories.  
Or someone will invent a cross-staff,  
a compass, or a nocturnal.  
Or the discovery of precious mineral  
or spice will inspire accuracy  
in the maps you desire.

*Where does that land end?*

*Does the sea surround the world?*

I cannot know. The Pole Star  
wanders like a guard  
looking for a place to nap.  
Sometimes it settles out of sight,  
and I pray the Little Dipper  
to not disappear and for Spain  
to be where it was  
and always should be.

You can play your trumpet and hope  
angels echo you home, but often  
there is no horizon or boundary  
to discover. The world spins too fast  
to be transcribed.



## Panther Creek

Paul Willis

Panther Creek, your flow beneath  
the highway bridge does not compare  
to that between these hemlock,  
cedar, and Douglas fir, not to mention  
the alder slotted into your current.

Of course, there is less of you  
the higher we climb, but a creek  
is so much more itself  
apart from the combustive talk  
of cars and trucks and things that go  
away before they think to arrive.

It has something to do with your mossy  
cliffs, the turquoise tumble of your waters—  
even the nettles along your bank,  
nettlesome as they may be.  
Most of all I like the way  
you speak to us in your own language,  
saying, and then saying again,  
what comes naturally.

—*Ross Lake Natural Recreation Area*

## Taconic State Parkway

Gabrielle Otero

In the country I am told  
rats are called field mice  
and cops are called sheriffs.  
This makes them seem harmless  
like everything else outside the city.  
When I get tired of being small  
I drive north to where tree tips  
prick the clouds like crowfeet  
and red does not mean stop, just look.  
Where light means fireflies caught in beer bottles  
and fire is another word for your own eye.  
Where Taghkonic used to mean in the trees  
before there was a road needing a name.  
I take it all the way to the end  
until the curves diminish like damp leaves.  
Where small is what you get when you  
file something down to its root.



## Life Among Tongues



# this is that and that is this

Susan Jahoda

*"But now follow the path of photography further. What do you see? It becomes ever more nuancé, ever more modern, and the result is that it can no longer photograph a tenement block or a refuse heap without transfiguring it. It goes without saying that it is unable to say anything of a power station other than this: what a beautiful world!"*

Walter Benjamin, *The Author as Producer*, 1934

As a traveller in India with a camera, the urge to make a picture was simultaneously countered by an uncomfortable feeling that I was "trespassing". I put my camera away and began a project addressing the conditions of the uninvited.

this is that and that is this begins with "photojournalism" and continues to reference this practice through a performative shift away from looking to eavesdropping. I am aware that "documenting" conversations is ethically ambiguous, but hope that the aesthetic operations engaged allow viewers and readers to realize that they are the subjects of these drawings.

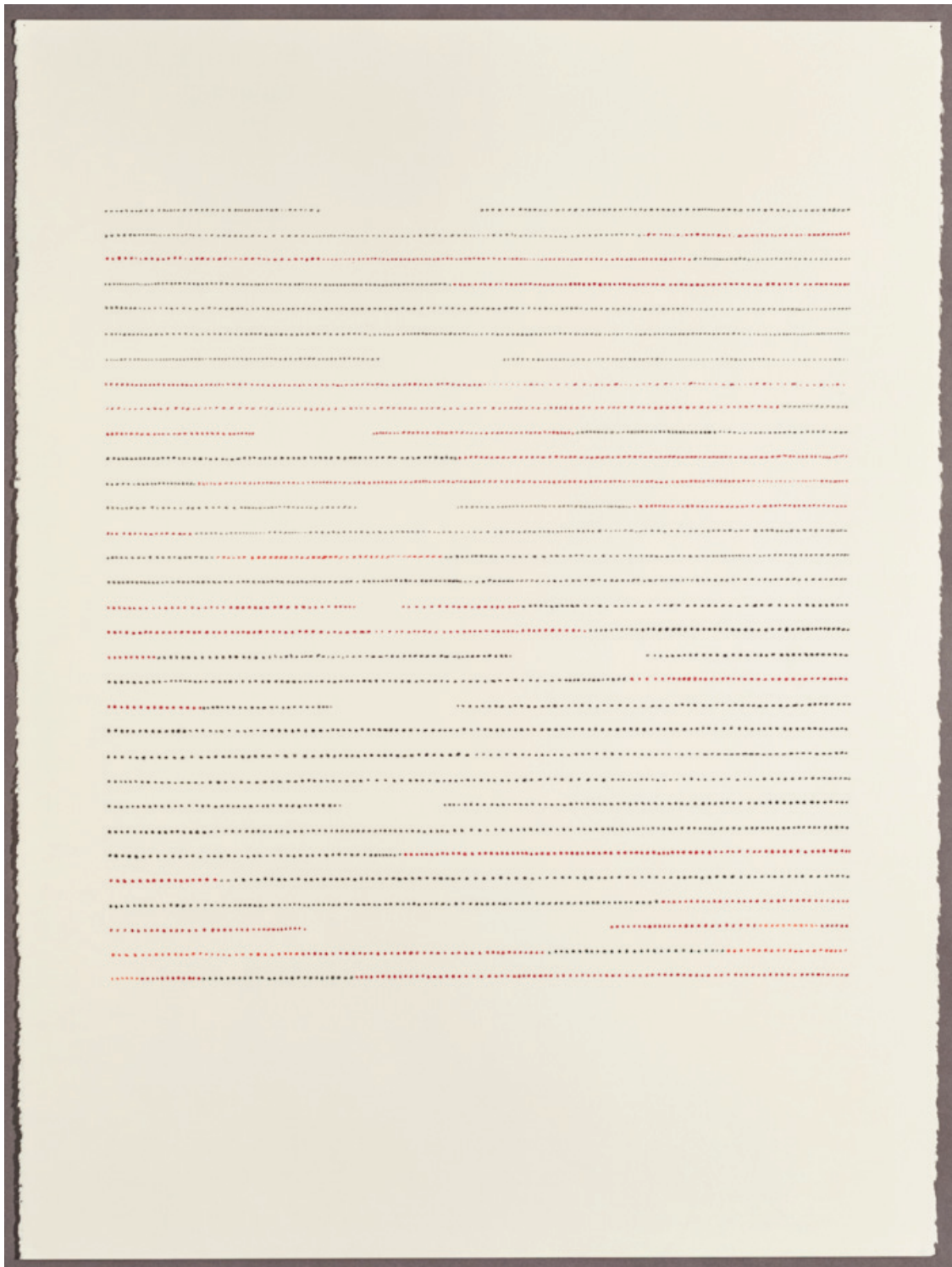
The project consists of overheard conversations between individuals in public spaces in many cities throughout India. Recorded and collected as notations in a pocket journal, they are ultimately organized by location and time. They situate people in relation to the practices of their everyday lives and, at the same time, position the artist as an observer outside of these practices.

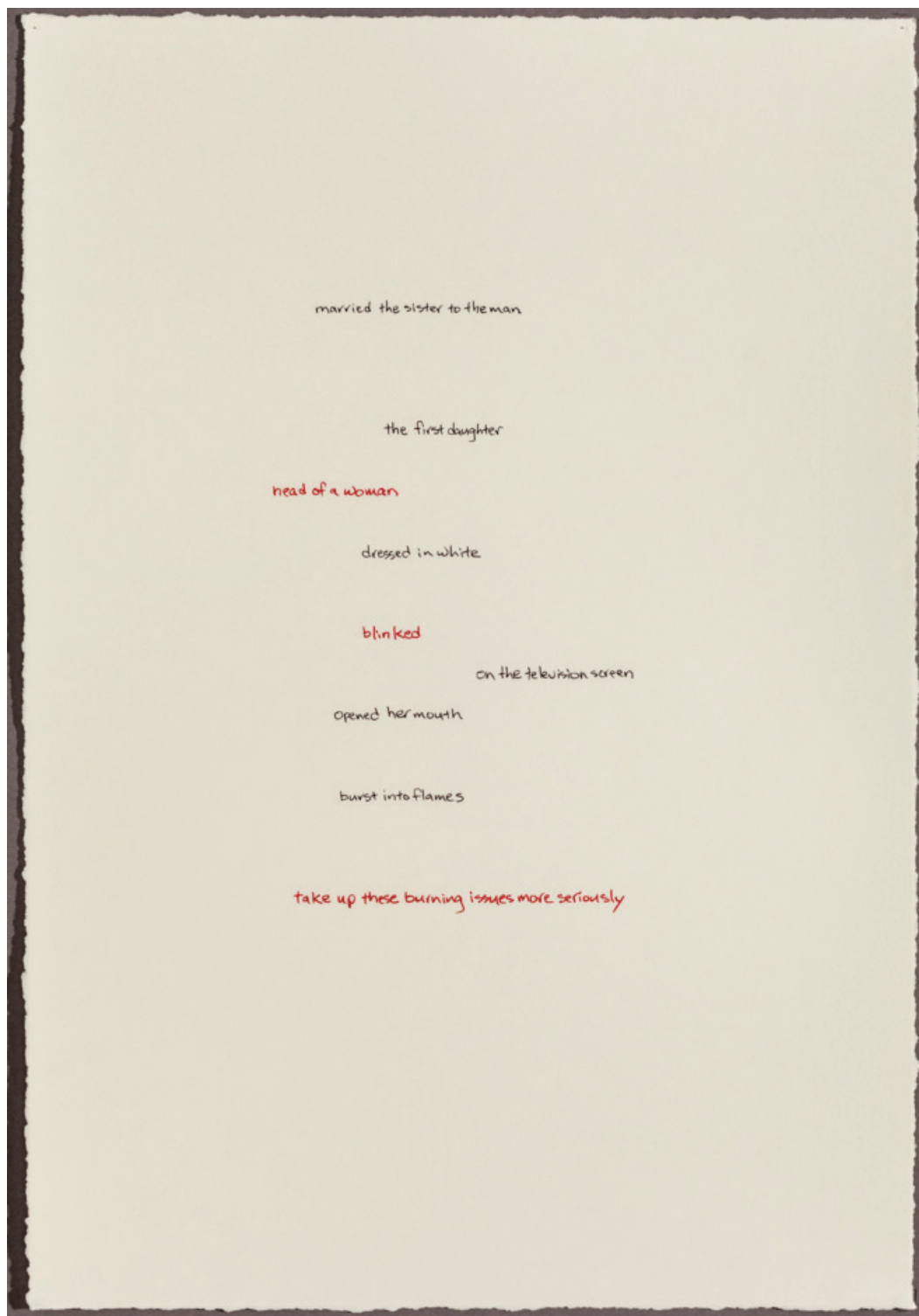
There are four hundred and forty-seven living languages in India, and one fifth of the population speaks the colonial language (English), which is directly associated with class mobility. As individuals code-switch between a native and the colonial language, I record the only words and phrases I understand, which are in English. Later, as my notebook is transcribed into an artist's book and wall drawings, these words float on a separate sheet in the spatial and temporal order that they were uttered and recorded.

In each case, the extent of a drawing is an indication of my presence as a listener, and as a rule does not exceed a single page in the notebook. The duration of an individual's utterance determines the length of each dotted line-segment, and the density of the dots that make up the line is an indication of the volume of their speech. Each speaker in the drawings is represented by a different color, and exhibition wall labels are limited to location, date, time, gender and an approximation of age, as, in most cases, this is all I can claim to know about the subjects of this project.

A selection of the drawings follows. You can view the full project at:  
<http://www.susanjahoda.com/tittit-table.html>





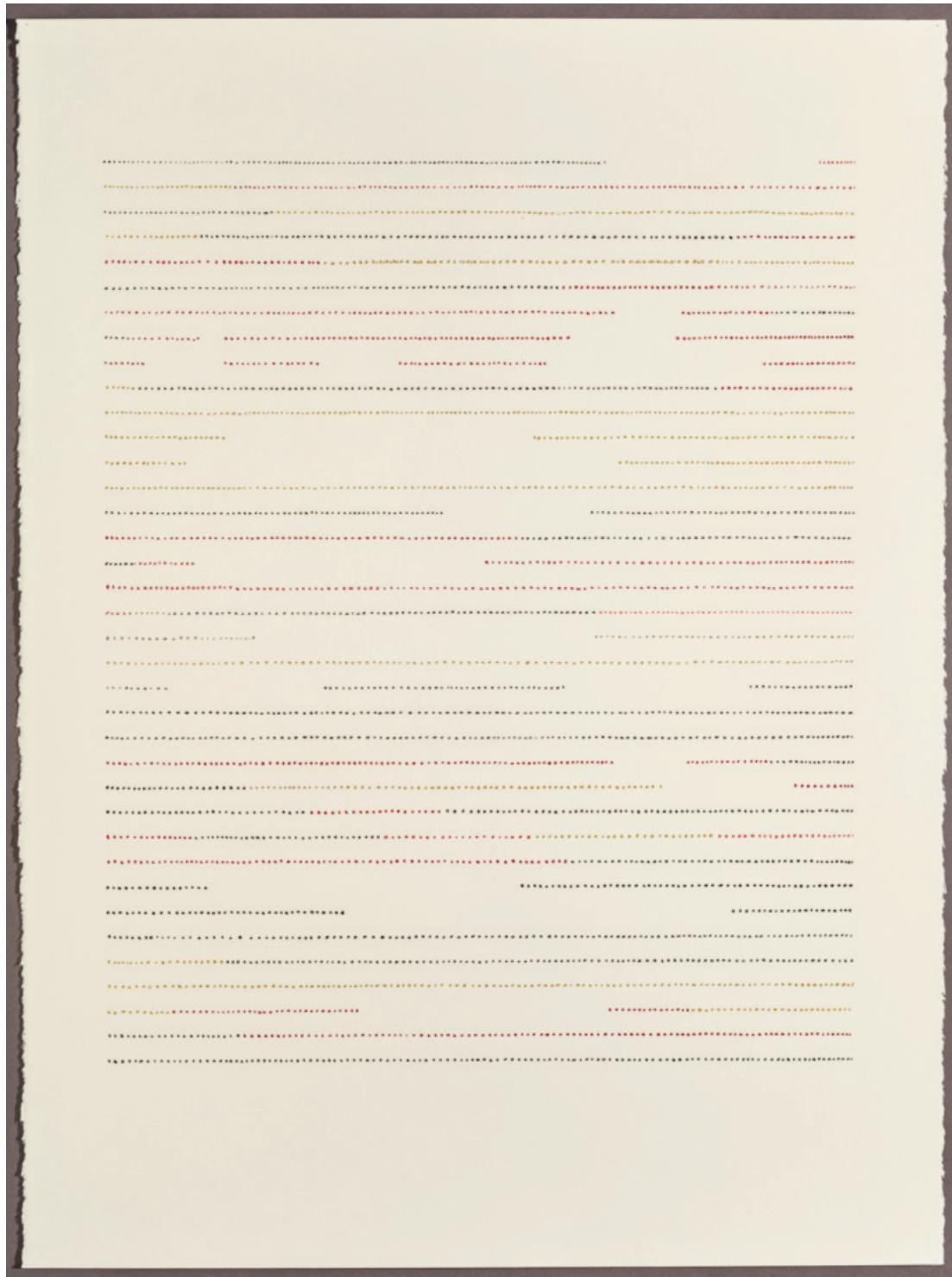


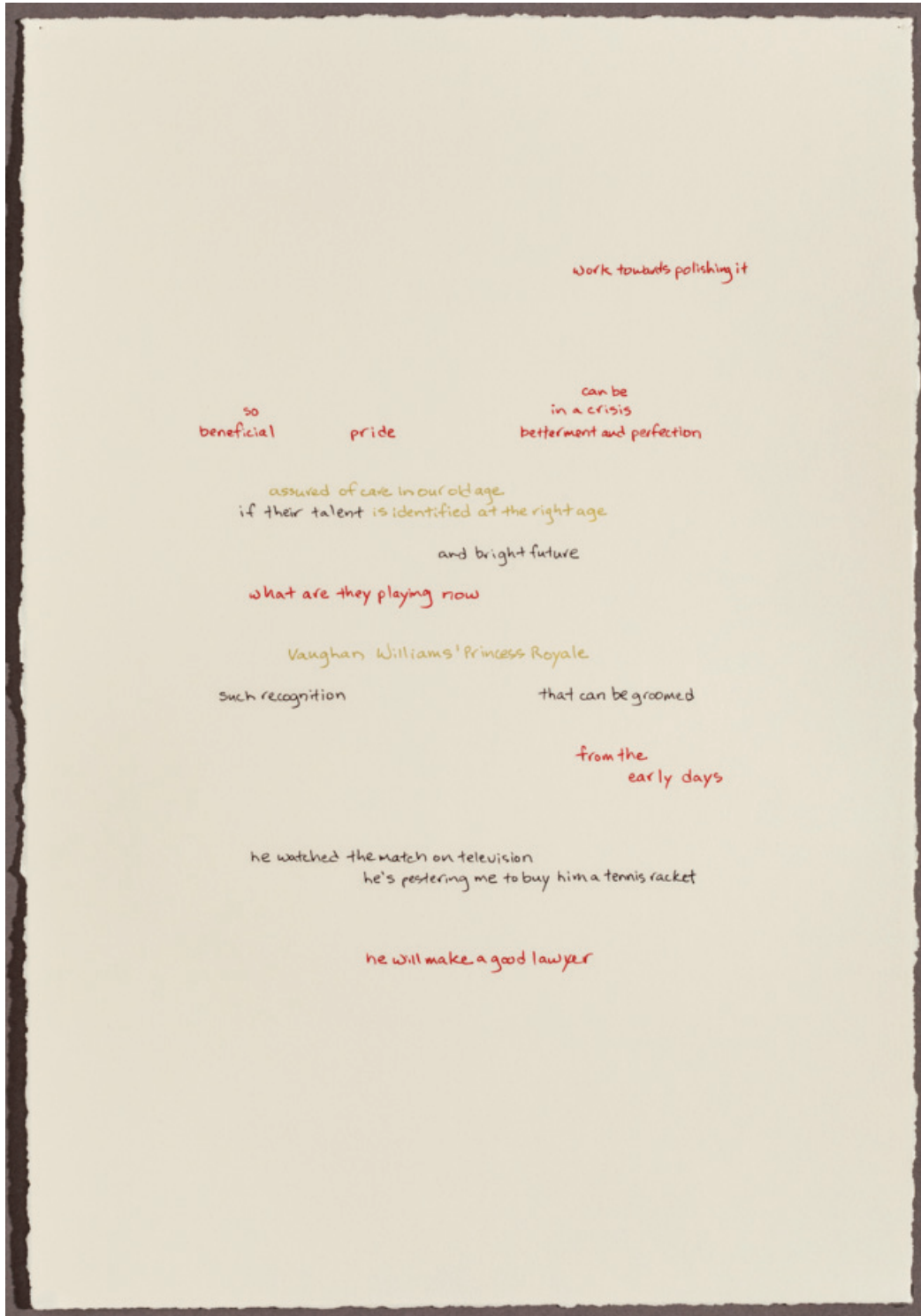
### Buses

Bus #155, Mumbai

Wednesday, January 28, 2010. 11:50 AM

Two women on the bus, unknown location at the time of conversation





### Gardens and Parks

Priyadarshini Park, L. Jagmohandas Marg, Mumbai

Thursday, January 14, 2010. 9:00 AM

Three women watching children at band practice

# Breakages in Japanese

Kathleen Hellen

I had to take three steps for every one of theirs,  
ducking under elbows, into rooms with yellow pencils.  
Sister Theresa Martin gave us cardboard letters.  
*Bug, dug, fun. Gud, duf, bun.* The “u” a strange  
umbrella, collapsing. It rained all day.  
“Only boys wear brown,” the girl in ribbons said,  
my boots under the desk. My boots inside a box  
that was the first September. “See?” *Okaasan* said,  
as if unwrapping fish, “These are not the *geta*. You can take big steps.”

Words like children skipped across the desk—  
through forests great as Gretel’s,  
through cats-and-dogs, translations,  
The Sister gave us milk *Okaasan* hates.  
*Run run run!* said vowels from *Dick and Jane*.

# Elder Doe

Olaya Barr

Instead of alternating the days of the week, like I usually did, I spent the entire ten days before my summer trip at Mamá’s house, since I wouldn’t be seeing her all of July. She never asked about my new stepmom or whether I was excited for the vacation with her in Hawaii. On my last night, Mamá made my favorite dinner.

Pork chop or pesto? She asked from the doorway.

Pesto.

We spoke only in Spanish then and ate at the small round table in the kitchen. We laughed and I didn’t like when dinner ended because she would go upstairs and watch crime shows that scared me. Blood bloomed on sidewalks.

A pair of missionaries interrupted our meal, ringing the doorbell twice.

Ay, no, why do they come at dinnertime?

Hi, I’m Elder Doe. His face was corrugated with acne scars and his shirt was too white, starchy paste. Mamá told them we were in the middle of eating dinner and that we weren’t interested. They said they understood but could they offer us any



help? My mother jokingly suggested that the kitchen was a mess and gave an exaggerated gesture, beckoning them in. It was the first time I had seen missionaries, and I didn't know that part of their job was to help with whatever was needed. All I knew about Mormons was what a boy in my class had once said: they could have a lot of wives.

We finished our pesto over pasta and giggled while the two strange men washed the blender, full of specks of pine nuts and basil. Mamá whispered in Spanish that their backsides were plump como toronjas, like grapefruits.

They left a book on our round table, tapped it, and smiled, "Para ustedes. For you to learn more about our faith." They had left the blender pristine and our countertops shined. I felt that the world was small and hilarious. The rest of our dinner we talked about what it would be like to be missionaries doing dishes. Instead of watching television in her room that night, Mamá tucked me in bed and told me a story about a cowboy named Pedo Gordo and his Indian compadre, named Culo. They were best friends and had many adventures. I thought they must've had to eventually part ways; after all, one had obligations to livestock, the other to his tribe. She assured me that they were always together, even if they were many miles apart.

"La soledad es algo necesario," she said. Solitude is necessary. "Everyone needs to learn como estar solo."

Soledad is also a common girl's name in Spain; people shorten it and say Sol, which means "Sun." Sun, short for solitude. She stayed with me in bed until I fell asleep. In my dreams, I saw the sun moving in a different hemisphere, and the lives of cowboys and Indians, which are really only ever told through story.

# What's Good for the Soul

Natasha Naayem

Here I am: seated, folded, like failed origami. Not that I've ever been good at following straight lines. The pilot says, rolling his "r"s, "We will be taking off for Beirut shortly." Hopefully, we won't have the same problem.

I don't usually mind being on planes—save the physical discomfort due to my legs being longer than most. Being suspended in mid-air is soothing. This is just an image, however. The speed gauges come to life. There is no turning back. From now on we're constantly moving, faster than under any other circumstances, and yet, if you were to fall asleep before take-off, you would never know you moved an inch. But I'm always awake. Always cramped. So it's good to stand up, circle through the aisles, try to stay balanced without needing to hold onto the other passengers' seats as you walk by.

"No plane ever crashed from turbulence," a scholarly looking man once said to me, before I knew anything about the mechanics. It seemed to make sense. I chose to believe him. But you could think about it the other way around. If the plane were crashing, wouldn't it feel like turbulence? Passengers are always kept in the dark—save for the illuminated screen of facts: Temperature, Altitude, Time Left Until Arrival. But I like cheap thrills: the palpitations from the highs and lows, the sudden change in cabin pressure. Everyone in the same boat. Everyone in the same plane. Everyone a foreigner and nobody has time to brush his teeth three times a day. Unless you're in business class, in which case, they give you a miniature bag of miniature toiletries, and there's cream and make-up remover in the bathroom. Cramped. I am not in business. I say I don't usually mind being on planes because this time I am not "on business" nor is the purpose of my trip "pleasure." If this paper were mine, I would add to it a square, and beside that mark "obligation."

\* \* \*

The last time I visited Zaina the flight took two hours. It was to New York, where she lived for a while before moving back to Lebanon. We spent the week together, just us, in the myriad of black and yellow cabs. When I say just us I mean we were the only two related. She lived with a roommate, Gina, and constantly welcomed friends into her apartment. Always entertaining: a product of our heritage, I suppose, but an initiative nonetheless. And one I've always admired her for having, since I've always felt more comfortable being alone in my home.

I was sixteen at the time and she was twenty-four, but my long legs came in handy and we never had a problem getting me drinks. At the time it seemed as though I was constantly buzzed, yet nothing was spinning. This may be the reason I chose to move to New York City for my undergraduate degree, and to take the job as a research lab assistant after I graduated. This juxtaposition: the pairing of the darkest color with the brightest one; this suspension in the rush. New York will always be

captured in black and yellow for me. But this time it's a twelve-hour flight, and we won't get a moment alone, Zaina and I. I know this already. It's partly my fault for coming so close to her big day. Mostly though, it's because our family is Lebanese. Zaina is the Queen Bee at the moment and everyone will be swarming around her.

\* \* \*

There are no signs to indicate which conveyor belt will deliver our luggage. But these passengers are reliable: they know where to go so I follow them. A man standing next to his two children helps me get my suitcase off the belt. I thank him in Arabic, and ask him where I can find a taxi in English. He points me in the direction, and then asks me if I'm here for the Khoury wedding. "It isn't often that a young woman travels to Beirut alone, with no one waiting to pick her up." I tell him that I know, but everyone is busy (a partial lie), and airports are always out of the way (a partial truth). I prefer being practical.

As we make our way to the exit, his daughter asks me if I am Lebanese. I tell her I am, and am surprised to learn that a little girl is capable of the piercing look of a skeptic. She asks her dad, in our native tongue, why don't I speak their language? Although I could make sense of what she said, she was right: I don't speak the language. A few words, yes, neither here nor there. I know how to indicate directions, and order food. You would think this comes in handy, and it does. Sometimes. Other times it just causes more confusion, more questions I don't wish to get into. Why do the taxis here take six customers in the back seat of their vehicles? There are no seatbelts. Why do the customers sit with five others on a seat made for three? They don't necessarily know each other. There are only gypsy cabs. They stop at waved hands and I'm already inside. I don't have a say, as I said, I don't speak the language. Not that it would make a difference in this case. It's because of the warmth. Everyone is related, somehow. We all deserve to sweat together. Conviviality. In English you say "my love." In French you say *mon coeur*, which means "my heart." In Arabic you say *ya rouhé*. It means "my soul." In Beirut, there are people who speak all three languages, but most choose to stick with Arabic. "There's nothing more beautiful than a language with more layers than the garlic used in *toum*," a cab driver once told me. I think he meant "onion," but the Lebanese spread garlic cream on everything.

\* \* \*

"Sweating is good for the soul," my aunt Yasmina, twice removed, tells me. And the eucalyptus spray has healing properties. We sit. We sweat. We are all related. Five pairs of X chromosomes, each with shared hidden patterns. A memory game. Flip the cards over. Even if you fail, you're bound to get them paired off eventually. And yet, my skin is white and drab against the turquoise tiles. Unlike my first cousin Zaina's. Hers is the color of soaked sand. If there were spotlights in this *hammam* she would look like the beach incarnate, lying there horizontally, her back along the turquoise tiles. You could think this difference was due to the subarctic climate I've been living in for the past fifteen years. But it's not. It is, somehow, genetic. Like

our eyes: almond, dark blue, almost black. And yet mine are different. You can see right through them, like the condensed humidity that forms droplets on the ceiling tiles. They have all positioned themselves on the top right hand corner of the squares, as if trying to escape to the adhesive grid fillings between the slippery ceramic surfaces. Maybe everyone would live on the edge if they too consisted of hydrogen bonds. "The middle way is the way of the wise," or so the saying goes. A single water molecule has the freedom to be stuck to another one instant, and in the next, detach and stick to a different one. A droplet falls onto my forehead. It runs down the side of my cheek leaving a smooth line amidst the mix of perspiration and accumulated water vapor. The phospholipid bilayer is made of hydrophobic heads and hydrophilic tails. Fat is hard to get rid of. But Zaina's mother thinks we can sweat it out before the wedding. The garlic cream we had three times today doesn't help, I'm sure.

\* \* \*

Zaina's younger sister Aia is the one on the receiving end of the customary "*habélék*"—its meaning equivalent to catching the bridal bouquet. But it comes my way as well, from a guest at the morning reception whom I don't know and who wants to introduce me to his son. Uncle Rayan, standing not far away, overhears, comes to my side, puts his arm around my shoulders and says, "Her brains are even bigger than her beauty. She is a scientist!" I smile politely at his exaggerations. It's rude, I've been told, to contradict a compliment.

"That may be true," Aunt Yasmina says, suddenly standing at my other side, "but all that time you spend in front of a microscope won't help you find a husband... and it can't be good for your eyes either. Don't tell me otherwise! Your father tells me how much time you spend studying, *habibté inti*! And it's been how long since your last date? Five, six months?" I don't work with a microscope, but for the rest, she's right. Her facts, that is. I don't agree with her ideals. In this small community, there's no room for secrets. No one has translucent prescription bottles on their nightstand. Problems are solved by word of mouth and only family has the best intentions. Aunt Yasmina winks at my future father-in-law. But when people are tickled they always end up saying, "Stop!" There aren't many synonyms for that word; it seems to be the only one that comes in handy. I smile even more sweetly and walk away. I'm not looking for a husband.

\* \* \*

Her dress is white like blow. "Mary Jane is my childhood friend, and Angie, well, she's the kind of friend you like to party with once in a blue moon, because you have absolutely no common moral values. Only a love to party, but that's not enough. I don't know, I was never fond of cocaine," Zaina said to me that summer in New York. We talked about everything. I never had a sister but that was what she was to me. Completely unreliable until the moment you really needed her: telepathy, or something like it. It was she who taught me about the freedom of being unreachable. Don't pick up your phone and eventually people get used to it, they stop

getting frustrated or angry. It becomes expected: a template formula. She was labeled “flakey.” But her flakiness was self-aware.

I knew that.

What do I know about her fiancé, though? Her husband by the time the sun sets on the Mediterranean. They met the first year she moved back to Beirut, and he too had just moved back from Chicago. “*Nassib!*” my grandmother on my father’s side said, and will continue to say: destiny.

\* \* \*

I have no projections for their future. They’ll leave for their honeymoon and I’ll go back to New York.

“This facemask is from Jordan, *habibté!* Made from the mud of the Red Sea. Make sure you put it on the night before. Your face will glow as if it were pregnancy,” my maternal grandmother had said to Zaina yesterday. Do you know what’ll happen to the tattoo on your hipbone if you get pregnant? Will it get deformed? Will it look just the same?

“*Shou yané*, glow as if it were pregnancy? The last thing we need is people thinking she’s pregnant before her wedding! I made an appointment for you with Jannine tomorrow, the best esthetician in Beirut. Your aunt Leila will go with you, she needs a bikini wax too,” your mother said. Do you miss Ben? That tall Norwegian you dated throughout college. The one who didn’t mind when you went months without waxing your legs. Can you fall out of love and then back into it with someone else? So quickly. So different. Typical looking, though handsome for sure. Zied is not much taller than Zaina. Their skin is similar in color, their voices tinged with the same expatriate accent. “Opposites attract,” she used to say, and I guess I had chosen to believe her.

We don’t get a moment alone. I see Zaina search for his eyes in the crowd gathered outside the church. Both of them are surrounded by congratulations and kisses on the cheek in series of three. He finds her gaze and they exchange a moment of telepathy. Like the ones I saw them share before the ceremony. As if nothing had changed. And yet everyone is celebrating. There are candles that light the path from the chapel to the buffet set up on the edge of the mountain, overlooking the sunset. When it’s the right time of the year in Lebanon, you can go skiing in the mountains and swimming in the sea on the same day. The photographer takes pictures of the couple, and anyone looking at them later will see that Zaina’s happy here. Her dress swirls as she dances with her husband. It catches the light from the sky, from the candles; makes them move like the silk tangles on the belly-dancer’s sash. Makes the two hundred guests put down their plates, their glasses, their social obligations. Stop making rounds and instead, spin in one spot.



# Molly Maguire Was An Irish Woman

Sylvia Cavanaugh

*A sizable portion of the men who were hanged as Molly Maguires in Schuylkill County were illiterate Irish speakers from the remote and impoverished western portion of County Donegal.*

I was a boy of Donegal and  
the Barrony of Boylagh  
that scoured seaboard discord  
in the turning knot of fiddle steps and  
the singing of the night  
on sunlit days my friends and I  
danced on naked granite

I couldn't have read what's on this page  
but was fluent in the cleft and field  
my words recalled our legends there  
in the telling of the names  
'til my hunger scratched a tenant's tune  
that soon became lament  
my landscape language useless

From the headland's stunted swarth I sailed  
across St. Brendan's Sea  
and on to Schuylkill County  
where my bone wracked body curved and cleaved  
snug to a mountain crevice  
fingering her fossil shells  
I spoke its salt blue tale

But the companies of coal and rail  
spoke another kind of story  
of industry and wages  
my tongue was tied and teetering  
I tripped above the blackened vein  
seeking only fairness

Old Molly Maguire crept to town  
her blood still trapped in the tightened fist  
begging bread for babes  
but mine was freed at the end of a rope  
in America  
America  
my Molly's heart beats here

# Mediated Stroll

## MARGENTO

Humane animal slaughter law—  
the headline is still on my mind  
chickens dumped in electric baths  
they cock their heads out the way I do  
now trying not to drown in the disc  
count food pool as I chicken out of Lobe  
laws down Rue Rideau which means curtain  
street so I hold my head up undercover  
immigrant in broad daylight  
secret accomplice of the beggars on the side  
walk outside the crippling state mono  
poly liquor store but the math  
I do won't help just as a missile  
hits the school on the left bank  
I suddenly learn from my Facebook newsfeed  
hiding eyes behind smartphone as pasty  
ends (that pass by) are easier to face  
than blank staring faces and pre  
tend the present is elsewhere  
and of course it is also  
in vertical time while on the horizontal  
the homeless Inuit is thirsty here  
and now and I happen to be in the same  
town although neither of us is I guess  
an Ottawan both foreigners in a city  
founded by foreign invaders trans  
lating the local *Kanata*—"village"—  
into the anglo "town" which I learn  
scrolling down the etymon  
line.com page comes from the Old  
Saxon *tun*, a fence, or wall  
which is still there between me  
and you, my love, with your best profile  
on the web, we need to trade more personal  
contact details please text me I love  
to dive into this sea of I-  
mages and palpable links to untouchable  
lives leaving a mark on my virtual Kitch  
issippi while a non-Algonquin algo  
rhythm captures the rhythm of the sky

line and automatically sends me on  
line to where I am—Ottawa, no kidding,  
and given my History another window  
pops up blocking my view of the city  
pictures: origin of place  
name—from *adawe*, “to trade”...  
Trade, be-trayed... What do the elect  
rocuted chickens have to trade,  
the homeless drunk who can’t afford  
a beer? Donno, that’s for the custom  
er®s to decide, I’m just a user.

## About the Contributors

**Olaya Barr** is an educator and writer living in New York. She was awarded the De Alba Fellowship for excellence in fiction writing as an MFA student at Columbia University, as well as a grant to attend artist residency Obracadobra in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her translations, poems, stories, and photographs can be found in such publications as *Forth Mag*, *Vagabond Multilingual Journal*, and *Princeton's Inventory*. She's currently working on a series of short-shorts that integrate bilingualism and photography, as well as translating the crónicas of Chilean activist and author, Pedro Lemebel. She blogs at [www.olayabarr.wordpress.com](http://www.olayabarr.wordpress.com).

**Elizabeth Bodien** grew up in the “burned-over” district of western New York State but lives now in the Ontelaunee Creek watershed near Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. Her poems have appeared in *The Litchfield Review*, *Fourth River*, *Frogpond*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Parabola* among other publications in the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and India. Her collections are the award-winning chapbook *Plumb Lines* (Plan B Press 2008), *Rough Terrain: Notes of an Undutiful Daughter* (FootHills Publishing 2010) about her mother's decline with Alzheimer's, and *Endpapers* (Finishing Line Press 2011). Currently she is working on an original libretto, and a collection of her trance writings.

**Dmitry Borshch** was born in Dnepropetrovsk, studied in Moscow, and today lives in New York. His drawings and sculptures have been exhibited at the National Arts Club (New York), Brecht Forum (New York), ISE Cultural Foundation (New York), the State Russian Museum (Saint Petersburg).

**Sylvia Cavanaugh** is a Pennsylvania native with an M.S. in Urban Planning from the University of Wisconsin- Madison. She currently teaches high school African and Asian geography and cultural studies. She is also the advisor for the District One break dancers. Her poems have appeared in *Stone Boat Literary Journal*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Red Cedar Review*, *An Ariel Anthology*, *We Are Poetry: A Love Anthology*, *Seems Literary Journal*, *Verse-Virtual*, *The Camel Saloon*, and *Midwest Prairie Review*.

**Kathleen Hellen** is the author of the collection *Umberto's Night* (2012), winner of the Jean Feldman Poetry Prize from Washington Writers' Publishing House, and two chapbooks, *The Girl Who Loved Mothra* (2010) and *Pentimento* (2014). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Barrow Street*; *Cimarron Review*; *The Nation*; *New Letters*; *Poetry Northwest*; *Poetry Daily*; *Prairie Schooner*; *Runes*; *Southern Poetry Review*; *Salamander*; *Stand*; *Sycamore Review*; *Tar River Poetry*; *Witness*; and elsewhere. Awards include the H.O.W Journal, Washington Square Review, James Still and Thomas Merton poetry prizes, individual artist grants from the Maryland State Arts Council and the Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts, and two Pushcart nominations.

**Tom Holmes** is the founding editor of *Redactions: Poetry, Poetics, & Prose*, and in July 2014, he also co-founded *RomComPom: A Journal of Romantic Comedy Poetry*. He is author of seven collections of poetry, most recently *The Cave*, which won The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award for 2013 and was released in 2014. His writings about wine, poetry book reviews, and poetry can be found at his blog, The Line Break.

**Shireen Hyrapiet** is an Instructor of Geography in the College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences at Oregon State University. She received her Ph.D in Geography and a Master's degree in Fire and Emergency Management Administration from Oklahoma State University. At Oregon State, Shireen teaches courses on Geography of the Non-Western World, Asia, Latin America, Sustainability, Environmental Justice, and Disaster Management. Her areas of research interest lie in Cultural Geography, Urban Geography, and Cultural and Political Ecology. Her research and teaching evaluate the changing dynamics of urban landscapes in cities of the Global South and in particular, the impacts on marginalized, under-represented, and vulnerable groups.

**Dave Iasevoli**, Ed.D., grew up in Brooklyn and now lives and teaches in the Adirondack Mountains of Upstate New York. He serves as an Associate Professor of Education and the M.S.Ed. Program Leader on the SUNY Plattsburgh Branch Campus, in Queensbury. His wife, Dianne, makes movies. He studied at Amherst College with Bob Thurman and received his doctorate from Columbia University. The poets who were central to his dissertation are John Donne, Wallace Stevens, Jorie Graham, and Gwendolyn Brooks. He has traveled through 50 states and loves the deserts of the Southwest, especially White Sands and Death Valley. He has published both poetry and non-fiction and studied at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference with Natasha Trethewey.

**Susan Jahoda** is an artist, educator, and organizer whose work includes video, photography, text, performance, installation and research based collaborative projects. Currently, Jahoda is a core member of BFAMFAPhD, and a co-founder of *NYC To Be Determined* and The Pedagogy Group, collectives of socially engaged artists and educators based in New York City. In 1993, Jahoda joined the collective and journal, *Rethinking Marxism*, where she served as arts editor until 2014. Her projects have received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, The New York Foundation for the Arts, and The Trust for Mutual Understanding, NYC. Jahoda is currently a Professor of Art at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and resides in New York City.

**Douglas Luman** is the Book Reviews Editor of the *Found Poetry Review*, Editor of *So to Speak*, Poetry Editor at Stillhouse Press, and Assistant Poetry Editor of the journal *Phoebe*. He can likely be found sleeping in a library in Northern Virginia.

**MARGENTO** (Chris Tănăsescu) is a Romanian poet, performer, and translator who has performed, lectured, and released books in the United States, Southeast Asia,



Australia, and Europe. His pen-name is also the name of his multimedia cross-art-form band, winner of a number of major awards including the Romanian Gold Disc in 2008 and The Fringiest Event Award, Buxton Fringe, UK, 2005. As recent recipient of a SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) grant he will continue to develop his Graph Poem project and other related graph theory and computational applications in poetry as an Adjunct Professor in the Computer Science Department at University of Ottawa. MARGENTO is *Asymptote* Romania Editor-at-Large.

**Dan Mills** is an artist and curator originally from upstate New York. He has lived and worked in Chicago and the Northeast, where he is now director of the Bates College Museum of Art and Lecturer in the Humanities. Topics that captivate Mills include cartography and other systems of visualizing and codifying information, history and current events, satire and humor. He works in a variety of media but is most known for his paintings and mixed media works on paper. Mills has had solo shows at galleries throughout the United States and China, as well as many academic institutions. His book, *The US Future States Atlas*, was published by Perceval Press in 2009. Mills is represented by George Billis Gallery, New York, and Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago.

**Natasha Naayem** grew up in Montreal, Beirut, and Paris before moving to New York to pursue her studies. She received her BA and MFA in Fiction from Columbia University, and is now living in Shanghai.

**Gabrielle Otero** received her BA in creative writing and film studies from Pepperdine University. She is currently an MFA candidate in poetry with a concentration in literary translation at Columbia University. She lives in New York and is the Donald Everett Axinn Fellow at the Academy of American Poets.

**Martha Pskowski** is a researcher and freelance journalist living in Mexico. She is currently a research assistant on a project of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) to understand social conflicts relating to the climate change policy REDD+. She began this project as a Fulbright scholar in 2014-15. Previous to this research, she volunteered at a migrant shelter in Oaxaca for Central American migrants passing through Mexico. Much of her journalism, which has been published in outlets such as *Common Dreams*, *Truth Out* and *Feministing*, has focused on immigration through Mexico.

**Hannah Star Rogers** grew up in rural Alabama and received her Ph.D. at Cornell University. She current holds the ArtHub residency in Kingman, Arizona. She teaches at Columbia University and the University of Virginia. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Catch & Release*, *Leonardo*, and *The Southern Women's Review*. She has received the Acadia National Park Service writing residency and is currently working on a manuscript, *American Letters*.

**Elizabeth Rush** is the author of many books including the recently released *Still Lives from a Vanishing City: Essays and Photographs from Yangon, Myanmar*. She has crossed borders with Bangladeshi cattle smugglers, built homes with Lima's squatters, and participated in the underground performance art scene in Yangon, Myanmar and Hanoi, Vietnam. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Granta*, *Orion*, *The New Republic*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Al Jazeera*, *Witness*, *the Huffington Post*, *Frieze*, *Nowhere*, *Asian Geographic*, *The Dark Mountain Project* and others. She is the recipient of the Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities at Bates College (2015-2017) and the Metcalf Institute Climate Change Adaptation Fellowship. She received her BA in English from Reed College and her MFA in Nonfiction from Southern New Hampshire University.

**Paul J. Willis** is a professor of English at Westmont College and a former poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California. His most recent collections are *Rising from the Dead* (WordFarm, 2009) and *Say This Prayer into the Past* (Cascade Books, 2013).